

## Still hip to be square

Story and photos by Jim Robinson  
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FALL CITY, Wa: One thing about the Korean carmakers – they never stand still.

In 2009, Kia introduced the Soul as a 2010 model. It was a radical departure from the humdrum models like the Spectra and Magentis that had gone before. But more than that, it was the harbinger of the Peter Schreyer design language that, with the Forte compact car, signalled not just a new design direction, but a corporate culture shift.

And that direction is beating the competition at their own game and that includes the Europeans, the Americans and, yes, even the Japanese.

They are doing it by offering leading edge engineering be it powerplants,

transmissions, fuel savings, electronics and all at attractive price points.

No matter how well a vehicle is selling, the Koreans keep on improving anything and everything. The 2012 Soul is a perfect example. It's only two years old and probably the best (and some might say the only) slab sided car on the market.

It starts with two brand new engines.

While they are the same displacement that's about the only similarity. The 1.6-litre inline four-cylinder with gasoline direct injection now produces 138 hp (up 16 hp) and 123 lb/ft of torque while the new 2.0-litre inline four-cylinder produces 164 hp (up 22 hp) and 148 lb/ft of torque.

The 1.6-litre features Kia's Idle Stop and Go (ISG) technology as an option. It temporarily turns off the engine when the vehicle is not in motion in situations



he 2012 Kia Soul (2u model shown) gets a refreshed exterior and a choice of two new engines and two new six-speed transmissions.

such as standing at a curb or at a stop light. The engine restarts automatically when the driver releases the brake pedal, resulting in lower levels of fuel consumption and emissions.

You'd think stop/start would be rather simple, but it is very complex. For instance a special reinforced starter motor is needed. The normal life of a starter is about 50,000-60,000 crank-overs. In the ISG Soul it has to be good for at least 350,000 starts because the car has been restarted so many more times.

I tried the ISG on my way to the press launch site in northern Washington State. The system worked as expected and should result in a 10 per cent saving in fuel consumption in real life.

Kia officials said the inclusion of ISG is actually the first step towards the eventual electrification of the brand. Stop/start is an essential part of hybrid and full electric cars. Also new for 2012 is a six-speed manual and six-speed automatic transmission that drives the front wheels.

Fuel consumption is rated at 7.4/5.6L/100 km city/highway for the 1.6-litre manual, 7.5/5.6L/100 km for the automatic and 7.0/5.4L/100 km for the ISG. The 2.0-litre is rated at 7.9/5.8L/100 km city/highway for the manual and 7.9/5.5L/100 km for the automatic.

With a starting price of \$16,595, there are seven trim levels, the 1.6 (\$16,595-\$18,995), 1.6 ECO (\$19,995), 2U (\$18,995-\$20,195), 4U (\$20,495-\$22,695), 4U Retro (\$23,495), 4U Burner (\$24,195), and 4U Luxury (\$25,395).

There's a lot standard even on the base model including electric power steering (EPS), tilt and telescopic steering column, power windows, door locks and mirrors, heated front seats and Bluetooth

hands-free phone connectivity.

Also standard are front fog lights, auto-off headlamps, body-coloured door handles and outside mirrors, rear wiper/washer, variable intermittent windshield wipers, privacy glass on the hatch and rear side windows, four-wheel disc brakes and 15-inch steel wheels.

A long list of standard driver and safety aids includes: front seat active headrests, dual front advanced airbags, and front seat-mounted and full-length side curtain airbags. An Antilock Brake System (ABS), Electronic Stability Control (ESC), Traction Control System (TCS), Electronic Brake Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist System (BAS), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC) and Vehicle Stability Management (VSM) also are standard, as are front and rear crumple zones, side-impact door beams and Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH).

But around town, the 1.6-litre with ISG is probably the way to go if your driving is primarily urban. Gasoline prices aren't about to go down, so if you are leery of the extra cost of a hybrid or electric car, the Soul becomes an interesting alternative.

In terms of the overall styling, Kia has kept exterior changes to a minimum with a larger grille and headlights with two rows of LED along the bottom – amber for turn signalling and clear for daytime running. At the rear there's a switch to LEDs for the taillights while the interior gets a dashboard facelift.

Seating is still more than adequate for five adults and cargo, thanks to the box-like architecture is 546 litres behind the rear seat, 1,511 litres for the seat folded.

So if want to add a little Soul to your life, remember it's still hip to be square.



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or  
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with a Rosemary, Barolo  
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or  
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